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ABSTRACT

One aspect of teacher induction that has been given inadequate attention in relation to its importance is the issue of mentor accountability. Using data from the 1989-1990 school year, this study investigated the degree to which mentors acted in accordance with standards set out by the Connecticut State Department of Education. Two research questions were addressed: (1) In what support activities are mentors engaged during the induction year? and (2) How do mentor activities align with the responsibilities set forth by Connecticut's induction program? Data were obtained from two sources: telephone surveys of mentors and beginning teachers, and mentor logs completed by mentors and signed by both the mentor and the beginning teacher. Mentor responsibilities include: meeting regularly with mentees, observation, developing the Connecticut teaching competencies, preparing for assessment, and log summaries. The findings of the study led to the conclusion that far less than 100 percent of mentors are meeting all of the responsibilities set out by the Connecticut State Department of Education. A list of 11 recommendations based on these findings as well as a list of 9 references is included. (LL)

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MENTOR ACCOUNTABILITY: ACTING IN ACCORDANCE WITH ESTABLISHED STANDARDS

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Research on teacher induction including orientation, assistance and advice in the first year(s) of teaching is abundant. The positive effects of mentoring novice teachers during the induction year(s) are well documented, (Odell, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1986; Godley, Wilson, and Klug, 1986-87; Huling-Austin,1988; Feiman-Nemser, Odell and Lawrence, 1988). One aspect of induction which has been given inadequate attention in relation to its importance, is the issue of mentor accountability (Wilder and Ashare, 1989). Given the potential impact of induction programs, and the heavy financial and human resource investments into the implementation of the mentoring component, the work of mentors warrants monitoring.

Kay (1990) defines accountability as the "realization of obligation to act in accordance with established standards and the willingness to have those actions evaluated accordingly." He adds that the most productive type of accountability is where "the individual holds him/herself accountable and does not require policing or directing by others to act productively." Using data from the 1989-90 school year, this study investigated the degree to which mentors acted in accordance with standards set out by the Connecticut State Department of Education.

A Connecticut State Department of Education evaluation of the 1988-89 teacher induction program examined the implementation of support and support activities (Allen, 1989). One encouraging finding of the study was that three-quarters of all novices rated mentor support as "very high" or "high." In addition, high percentages of novices felt more competent as teachers and more enthusiastic about teaching because of mentor support. Both novices and mentors were asked whether mentors should be monitored. While ninety-two percent of the novices responded positively to that question, only forty-eight percent of the mentors responded positively. This was surprising in light of the recognition by mentors that some "slippage" in the quality of mentors had occurred. When mentors were further asked who should monitor support teachers, over one third of the mentors suggested the district facilitator, fifteen percent suggested the building principal, and only thirteen percent suggested themselves as appropriate monitors. A small percentage (3%) suggested that beginning teachers initial the informal logs of activities kept by mentors. Recommendations of the evaluation study included the development of a system for ensuring the accountability of mentors, as well as increased attention toward issues of quality control of mentors and their work.

As a result of those recommendations, the Beginning Educator Support and Training program (BEST) developed a system including reporting forms (resembling contracts) which spell out responsibilities and require sign-off by both mentor and building principal, and mentor logs in which mentor/novice activities are recorded, and then are signed by both the mentor and the novice. In addition, during the 1989-90 school year, a follow-up evaluation was conducted utilizing telephone survey

methodology, with specific portions of the evaluation targeting mentor responsibility.

Purpose of the Study

The overarching purpose of this study was to investigate the accountability of mentors in Connecticut. In other words, are they doing what they are paid to do? Two research questions were addressed in this study:

1) In what support activities are mentors engaged during the induction year?
2) How do mentor activities align with the responsibilities set forth by Connecticut's induction program?

Data was obtained from two sources: telephone surveys of mentors and beginning teachers, and mentor logs completed by mentors and signed by both the mentor and the beginning teacher.

Accountable for What?: Mentor Responsibilities

Responsibilities of mentors are addressed generally in their initial training (CORE) and are specified in the Support Teacher Handbook. In addition, they are listed on the reporting form (contract) which is completed upon placement, as well as in the mentor log in the forms of narrative explanation (Appendix A) and visual representation (Appendix B).

Follow-up training during placement is focused on skill development specific to the articulated responsibilities. These responsibilities include:

a) meeting regularly (average once per week for a minimum of 30 minutes per week) with beginning teacher over the course of the year;
b) meeting and observing at least eight times per year with the beginning teacher in each other's classroom (Some of these sessions should be demonstrations of effective teaching practices by the mentor while others should be focused on the beginning teacher's teaching. The observations of beginning teachers should be accompanied by focused formative feedback);
c) providing support for the development of the beginning teacher's skills focused on the Connecticut Teaching Competencies (i.e., planning of instruction, classroom management, instruction and assessment of student learning);
d) assisting the beginning teacher in preparing for BEST assessment process;
e) recording meetings and activities with the beginning teacher (a-d) in the mentor log; and
f) completing the appropriate follow-up training program.

The last two responsibilities are essentially "no-choice" due to the built in mechanism for accountability at the RESC level.

Thus, the above provides a job description, so to speak, of mentors in Connecticut, and describes the responsibilities for which they are held accountable.

FINDINGS

Telephone Survey Data

Beginning Teacher Reports of Mentor Work

Telephone survey data was collected from beginning teachers in reference to four articulated responsibilities of mentors: 1) meeting regularly, 2) observation accompanied by feedback, 3) developing teaching skills and competencies, and 4) assisting with and preparing for assessment. Figure 1 illustrates beginning teacher reports regarding the responsibility of mentors to **meet regularly** with beginners:

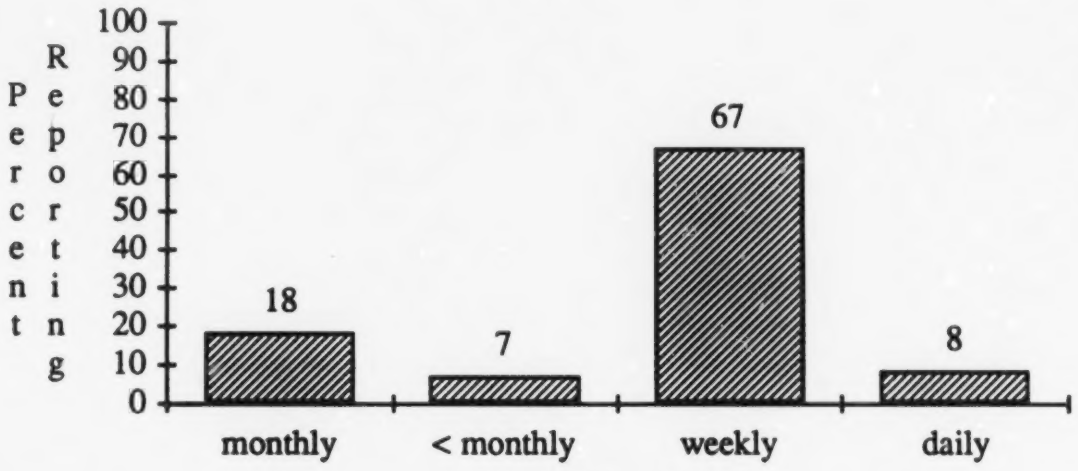

Figure 1

Despite the fact that only two-thirds of the mentors were reported to have met "regularly" or more often with their beginners, 93% of beginning teachers rated the amount of time spent with mentor "adequate" or "more than adequate."

When asked about the major focus of the support received from mentors over the course of the year, beginners reported spending time with mentors as illustrated in figure 2:

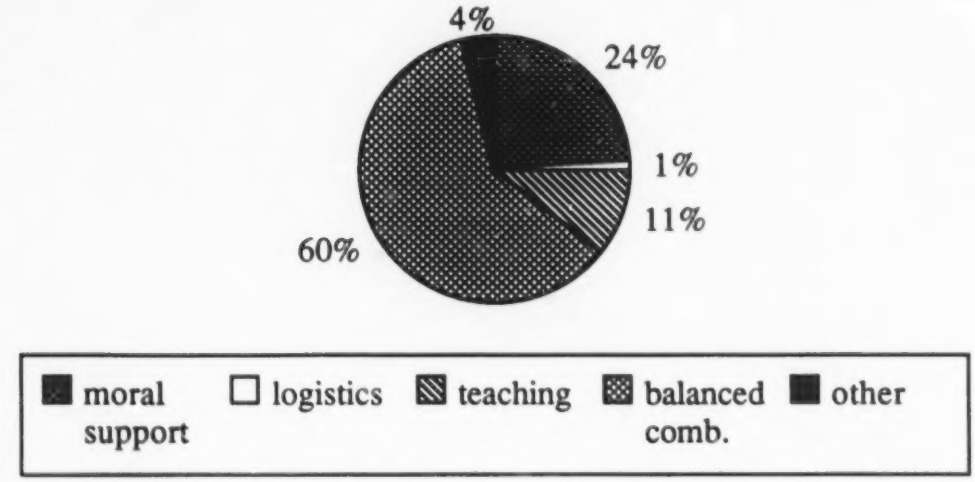

Figure 2

The relatively low percentage of time reported spent on moral support is incongruent with the high percentage of beginners (85%) reporting that mentors were available on a weekly basis as a "sounding board" for them. In a later question about how frequently they had had a conference with their mentor about instructional issues, 73% reported doing this on a weekly basis. Thus it appears the broad concept of balanced combination may have been perceived as discussions of teaching integrated with providing moral support. In a related question, 8% of beginning teachers reported that their mentors had never worked with them on instructional methods, while 18% had never worked on student discipline with their mentors.

Regarding **observation accompanied by focused feedback**, the following data was revealed by beginners:

Beginners reported the frequency of mentor observation as follows:

15% weekly
33% monthly
36% less than monthly
11% one time
5% never

Report of beginning teacher observation of mentors was somewhat less:

7%	weekly
18%	monthly
27%	less than monthly
14%	one time
34%	never

In fact, beginners reported observing other teachers more frequently than they did their mentors, with 8% of beginners reporting observing others on a weekly basis, and 21% on a monthly basis.

A related finding was the frequency with which mentors "scripted" the teaching of the beginner (scripting was described to beginners as "observing and writing down what went on in the classroom"). Frequencies of this activity were reported as follows:

5%	weekly
19%	monthly
29%	less than monthly
19%	one time
28%	never

Although 28% reported never having been scripted, a large percentage (85%) of beginning teachers reported that their mentors provided them with clear, constructive feedback that helped them improve their teaching. The frequency of mentors providing feedback on beginning teachers' teaching was reported as follows:

27%	weekly
40%	monthly
23%	less than monthly
6%	one time
5%	never

Given the conflicting reports on observation and use of scripting as a method of classroom data collection, one can conclude that not all mentor observation includes data gathering, and that feedback is often given without the inclusion of hard data extracted from observations.

Data regarding the responsibility of mentors to provide support in the development of beginning teachers' skills focused on the Connecticut Teaching Competencies was drawn from numerous survey questions.

Frequency of mentors spending time with beginners going over the Connecticut Teaching Competencies was reported as follows:

18%	weekly
33%	monthly
33%	less than monthly
10%	one time
6%	never

Figure 3 illustrates the most frequently cited topics discussed during weekly meetings with mentors, all of which relate to the Connecticut Teaching Competencies.

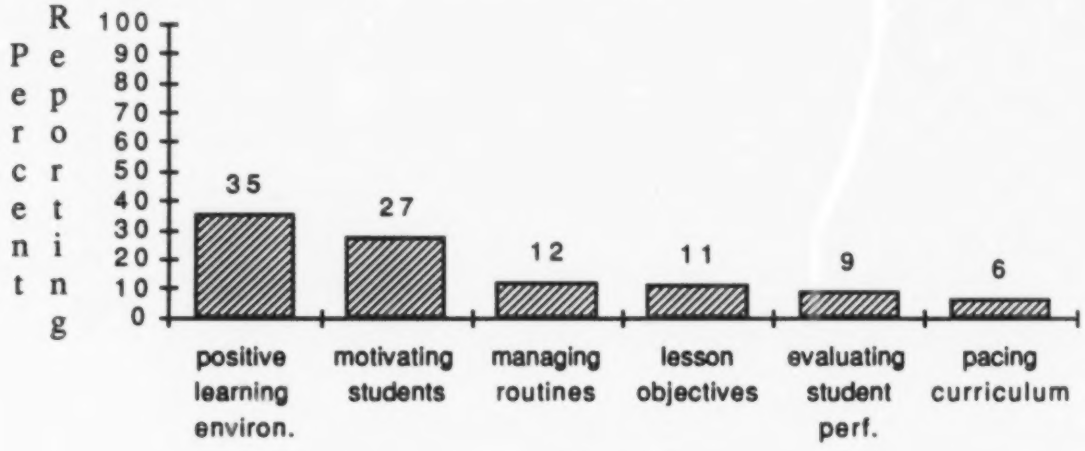

Figure 3

Regarding mentor assistance in **preparing for the assessment process**, the following findings are significant.

- **50% of beginning teachers reported being completely prepared for the assessment process, with nearly 61% reporting their mentor as the person who helped them most in preparing.**
- **45% reported that the mentor and the beginner used the Connecticut Competency Instrument (CCI) "a great deal" to focus their work together.**
- **90% reported mentors "going over" the CCI with them during the assessment process.**
- **5% reported not using the CCI at all with their mentor during the assessment process.**

- 88% reported the mentor providing assistance on a specific indicator of the CCI during the assessment process, while 12% reported not receiving assistance regarding specific indicators.
- 65% of beginners reported getting assessment assistance from mentors in the area of writing lesson objectives, while 87% got assessment help regarding instructional strategies.
- Despite positive beginning teacher responses regarding the specific assistance provided by mentors before, during and after assessment (49% of beginners rated the quality of mentoring "very high"), 46% stated that they could do without the mentor, and that the mentor was not needed.

Mentor Reports of Their Work

A direct comparison of mentor and beginning teacher responses was not possible because of the dissimilarity of questions asked within the telephone survey. However, some survey questions and responses are relevant to two areas of mentor responsibility: meeting regularly, and assisting in the preparation for the assessment process.

Mentor reports of meeting frequencies are illustrated in figure 4.

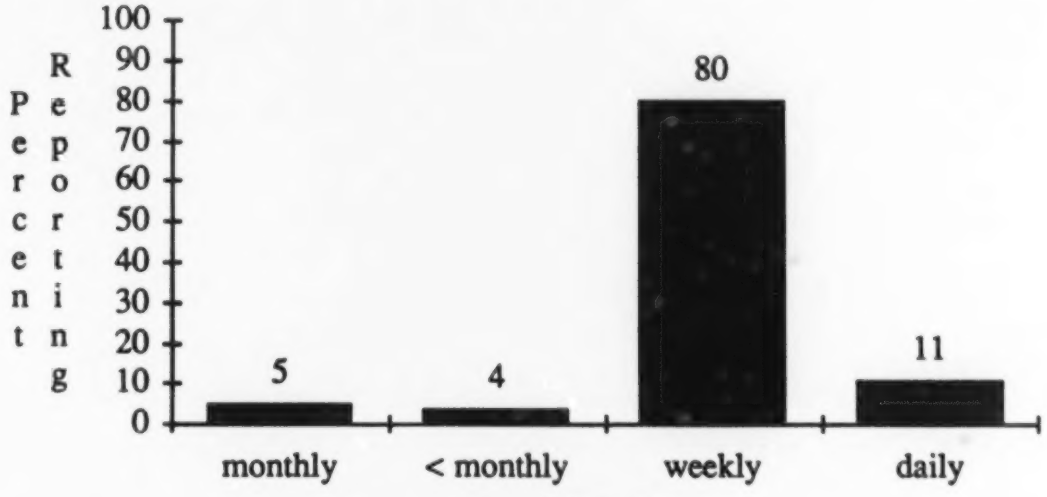

Figure 4

The focus of mentor-beginning teacher meetings as reported by mentors is illustrated in figure 5 below.

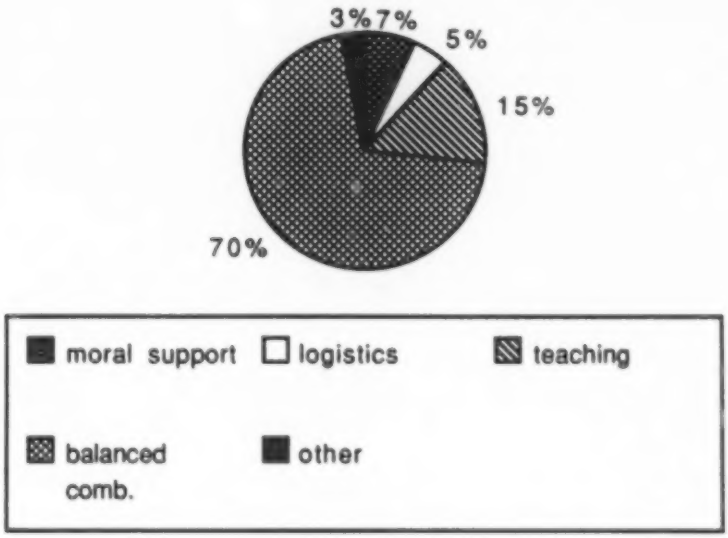

Figure 5

These findings are inconsistent with those reported by beginners, in that mentors' perception of time spent in support for teaching is greater than that perceived by beginners. Conversely, mentors' perception of time spent in providing moral support is less than that perceived by beginners.

Regarding assistance with **preparing for the assessment process**, the following findings are significant:

- 100% of mentors reported going over the Connecticut Competency Instrument with beginners during the assessment process, with 91% assisting with a particular indicator(s) on the CCI.
- 86% reported helping the beginner to write lesson objectives for assessments.
- 98% reported discussing instructional strategies that might be used during an assessment.
- 95% reported spending time processing after assessments, with 80% reporting providing special assistance following the beginner's receipt of the assessment report.
- 19% reported that they did not follow through with special assistance on the basis of the assessment report.
- 100% reported going over logistics of assessment process with the beginner.

Figure 6 illustrates a comparison between mentor and beginning teacher perceptions on certain aspects of preparation for assessment.

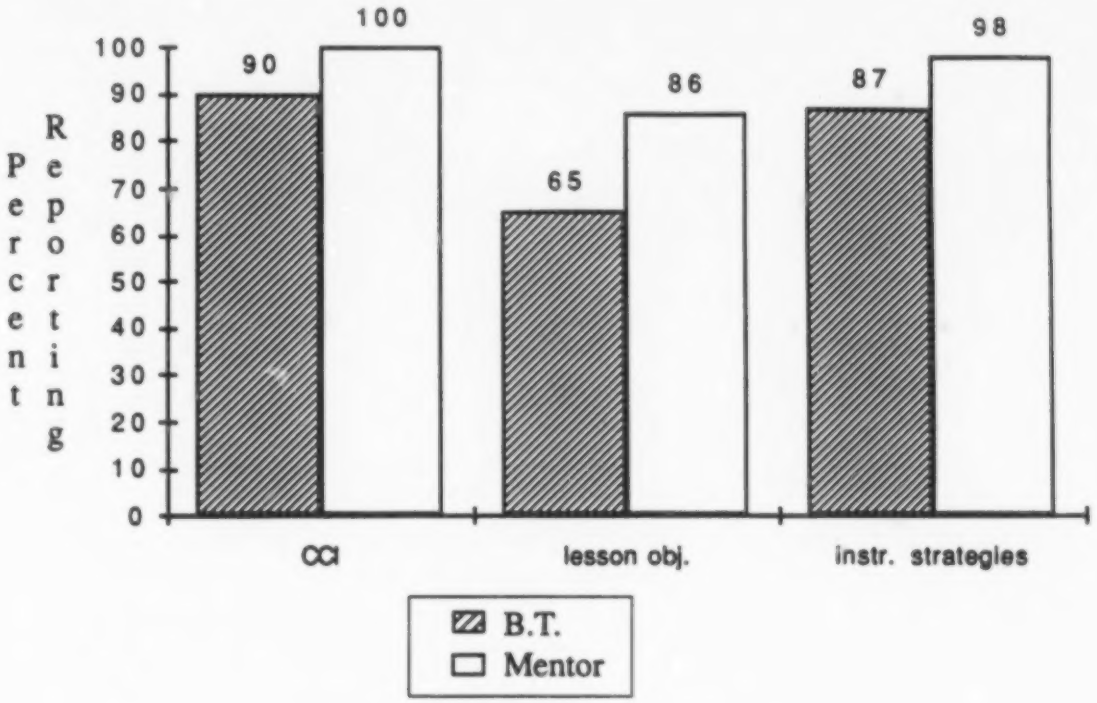

Figure 6

Mentor Log Data

What Mentors Actually Do

While survey questions targeted specific areas of mentor activities and responsibilities, mentor logs are more open-ended and journalistic in nature. Instructions for using the log include directions to record all meetings and activities taking place with the beginning teacher. Mentors are encouraged to complete log entries with the beginner, in order to reflect upon the meeting, share perceptions of what was accomplished, and plan future work. Mentors are asked to record brief descriptions of the nature and focus of the activity, approximate length of meeting or activity, and to indicate whether a substitute was used for the meeting.

Due to the range of writing styles of mentors, and the various ways in which activities were reported by mentors within the confines of the logs, it was not possible to analyze logs strictly in a quantitative fashion. Thus, log analysis used a qualitative approach with categories and patterns of activities emerging from the narratives within. The following

generalizations were drawn from the analysis of a sampling of 20% of the mentor logs.

Responsibility #1: Meeting regularly

- Approximately 1 of every 3 logs showed evidence of meeting every week at least once, with many of those being multiple meetings within the same week. These were categorized as "frequent meetings." Although length of meetings were rarely noted, nearly all contained accounts of meeting topics.
- In approximately one quarter of the sample logs, there were several periods (dry spells) where no mentor/beginning teacher interaction occurred. In these cases, either the week's entry space was left blank, or a note was made as to the absence of meetings between the mentor and beginner.
- Regarding the focus of weekly meetings, meetings and discussions are often centered around procedural issues within the school, and logistics. A very typical entry in this regard includes discussion about field trip procedures, and in several of the logs, this particular theme was pervasive.
- At least 15% of the logs revealed the following pattern: rather than recording activities and focus of meetings, mentors wrote glowing descriptions of the skill and energy levels of beginners, with lengthy, subjective, global comments as to the quality of teaching observed. These logs were evaluative in nature, and exclusively positive in tone.
- In approximately one quarter of the logs, a pattern of non-instructionally based conversations were documented around such topics as: school district budgets, school policies, evaluations by building administrators, the injustice of the assessment process, biographical notes about the beginner, meeting set-up and arrangements, school calendars, faculty meetings, reduction-in-force policies, and recreational activities.

Responsibility #2: Observation

- A small percentage of logs were categorized as "frequent observation" (for purposes of this study, "frequent" is defined as at least once per month). In approximately one out of 10 in the sample, a pattern of frequent observation was identified, with specific observation focus noted. In an overwhelming number of these entries, initiation and closure were indicated (Indicator IIB on the CCI, "Structure of the Lesson") as the focus of observation.
- In approximately half of those logs identified as "frequent observation," notation was made of follow-up conferences. However, within these notions, feedback was rarely mentioned

specifically. The lack of mention of specific feedback may be due more to mentors feeling that feedback is implicit in conferencing, than that feedback was excluded from the conference. A typical entry in this regard is as follows: "Observation period G, pre-algebra, looking at classroom management." "Post observation meeting, we talked about room arrangement."

- A large percentage of logs were categorized as "occasional observations" (for purposes of this study, occasional observations are defined as 2-3 observations over the course of the year). Approximately 7 out of ten logs fall into this category. These logs contained notations of mentor observations of beginning teachers with the observation focus usually identified. Closure was a frequently cited focus of observation.
- Approximately one half of the sample showed evidence of at least one occasion of mentor demonstration of teaching. Mentor demonstrations of teaching were documented within the range of no demonstrations to once a month.
- In less than 1 out of 10 logs, mentor demonstrations of teaching were accompanied by accounts of the focus of the conversations both before and after the modeling occurred (pre-observation conference, demonstration and post-observation conference). Nearly all of these entries included notations of how much mentors learned about their own teaching by having to be articulate about it to a colleague.
- Approximately 2 out of 10 logs contained no evidence of observation.
- Post-observation conferences were recorded more often than pre-observation conferences.

<u>Responsibility #3: Developing the Connecticut Teaching Competencies</u>

- Approximately 1 out of 10 logs reported frequent (at least once per week) discussion of pedagogy, using language specific to programs and models presented in district staff development programs (i.e. Hunter, Cooperative Learning, Learning Styles etc.).
- Numerous entries (approximately 1 of 10) explicitly identified beginning teachers' area of weakness (typically closure was noted), with only occasional mention of strategy used by the pair to improve in specified area.
- Approximately 7 out of 10 of the logs indicated patterns of discussions focused on general teaching effectiveness in the areas of classroom management, learning environment, student testing.
- At least one of every three logs mentioned occasional "brokering" with in-building teachers who were more "expert" regarding a beginning teacher need. For example, pairing beginning teachers

up with other teachers of similar content or grade level to observe, discuss content, obtain information, materials etc.

Responsibility #4: Preparing for assessment

- Discussion of assessment logistics (schedule, report delays, pre-assessment interviews, assessor behaviors) was pervasive, and was reported in nearly 90% of the logs.
- In nearly 70% of the logs, lengthy notations were made regarding the lack of confidence in assessment report accuracy. Mentors were quite adamant that "unacceptables" could have been erroneous, and invariably these statements were followed by negative comments regarding the injustice surrounding the lack of feedback as well as the ineffectiveness of the rating system.
- Documentation regarding preparation for assessment contained only rare mention of specific indicators in the CCI. Strategies for improvement related to specific indicators to be assessed were mentioned in only a few of the logs. In general, log entries addressing assessment preparation activities contain vague and imprecise references to the assistance provided in the preparation for assessment. A typical comment in this category is as follows: "Discussed assessment process and B.T.'s feelings about observation." "Met with B.T. to go over assessment forms, role played possible situations with assessor." "Looked over pre-assessment info. form to check information. Discussed with B.T. any questions or concerns prior to assessment."
- In a very small percentage of logs (approximately 2%), CCI terminology was used to describe focus of meeting or discussion. Through the use of language, it became apparent to the reader that the mentor had a trained assessor's knowledge of the CCI, as statements were made as to the effectiveness of the teacher specific to concepts and indicators in the instrument.

Log Summary

1) Approximately 33% of mentors meet regularly with beginning teachers (at least once per week). Mentor-beginning teacher meetings range in frequency from no meetings per week, to 4 meetings per week, with the average being once per week. The amount of time spent during those meetings was undetermined, as so few logs had time notations.
2) A little more than 20% of the logs revealed a minimum of 8 observations followed by conferencing. Of the 20% that specifically met this responsibility, there was almost an equal balance of observation and demonstration. Only 1/4 of those recording at least 8 meetings referred to utilizing the opportunity for 8 -1/2 days of substitute time. In most cases, no mention was

made of the logistics around arranging coverage, however, in at least one log, details were noted regarding an observation alternative: video tape lessons followed by mutual analysis and discussion.

3) In nearly 65% of the logs, a pattern was evident of mentor support in developing beginning teacher skills focused on the Connecticut Teaching Competencies. A pattern was declared if specific teaching competencies were mentioned (on average) in two or more of the four weekly entries.

4) Approximately 75% of the logs showed evidence of a pattern of assistance to the beginning teacher in preparing for or debriefing of assessment. In general, depth or breadth of the quality of assistance provided was unable to be determined, as vague descriptions were typically given, i.e. "We prepared for B.T.'s first assessment of the year," "B.T. and I worked on lesson for assessment for this week," "discussed dates when state assessor will be in, and went over what he or she will be looking for," "---- worried about her assessment day. We talked over her problems in her program and the explanations to be given to her assessor," "----- received notice that she would be assessed in April. We talked about the entire experience in general and decided that we would use a few meetings to 'brush up' on CCI."

CONCLUSIONS

Discrepancies exist between survey data (perceptual data recalled over extended period of time) and log data (data recalled and written down from week to week). It appears that information from both mentors and beginning teachers is both quantitatively and qualitatively different on surveys than was actually reported in logs. It seems that log information may be more accurate given that reports are written while activities are more current.

For the most part, mentors appear to be energetically engaged in many support activities with beginning teachers. They spend much time in discussions about teaching. In addition, much time is spent discussing topics of interest to themselves and to beginning teachers. It appears that many of these topics, however, are not directly related to instruction. Both surveys and logs indicate what seems to be an inordinate amount of time providing moral support and emotional support. Odell (1990) reminds us that "the provision of emotional support can be a seductive activity." It is far easier to conduct free flowing conversations around non-threatening topics (i.e. field trip permission slips and procedures), than to probe a colleague's thinking on the results of a difficult classroom episode. Logs reveal that many relationships have not set limits on the "domains of

personal and spiritual growth" in order to keep the interactions with the new teacher focused on the professional development of that teacher.

It is apparent that a small percentage of mentors take their roles as instructional coaches more seriously than others. This serious "instructional coach" label applies to those whose logs reveal continuous patterns of assisting the beginner with instruction in all three phases: planning, interaction and reflection. In addition, these logs contained no evidence of discussions of personal issues, and frequently reference student learning. What is not known is whether or not many more mentors might fit this category in real life, but have not written logs in a way that accurately reveals such activity.

Mentors seem to be spending adequate time in the broad area of the Connecticut Teaching Competencies. However, for whatever reasons, the percentage of mentors who are meeting all of the responsibilities set out by the CT State Dept. of Education is far from 100%. Far too many do not meet with beginners on a weekly basis; far too many do not observe beginners, and thus deprive the beginner of valuable feedback on their teaching; and although an extremely high percentage of time is devoted to technical assistance with passing assessment, the time spent on technical details has little impact on developing teaching effectiveness. Judging by these findings, it appears that somewhere along the line, mentor preparation and training has failed to clearly communicate its expectations for the mentor role. In addition, time, motivation and feelings of inadequacy may also be factors influencing the numbers of mentors not meeting these responsibilities.

Both survey and log data indicate a great deal of time spent in mentor/beginning teacher meetings on the assessment process. However, in general, these meetings do not seem to focus on the improvement of specific indicators of teaching competence, but rather heavily focus on procedural and logistical assessment issues. In many cases, logs were used to vent frustrations about the process. There was a lack of evidence that mentors used the assessment process as an opportunity for instructional improvement, with themselves as facilitators to that end. It appears that mentors perceive assessment as something to get through, as evidenced by entries indicating a "count down" type of approach (example, "Now that the first three are over, the next three should go quickly").

In general, there appears to be a pervasively negative attitude throughout log entries when it comes to the assessment of beginning teachers. This may be due, in part, to inherent negative feelings about evaluation processes (McGreal, 1982). Attitudes are hard to change, and it appears that the training for mentors has not provided enough information or evidence to convince them of the benefits of assessment. In addition, although the BEST program is a two-pronged program, with assessment and support theoretically working side by side toward the professional growth of teachers, mentors still seem to reveal an "us and them" attitude.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings presented above, the following recommendations are made with the goal of improving mentor accountability.

1) Future surveys should include similar questions for mentors and beginners in order to provide more comparative data.
2) Explicitly describe to mentors during both initial CORE training and follow-up training, the differences between mentors and randomly chosen colleagues.
3) Be clear in follow-up training regarding differences between moral support and instructional improvement, making certain that all mentors know that their primary role is that of a coach for instructional improvement.
4) Provide mentors, during follow-up training, with explicit verbal review of the expectations for their role, including meeting, observation, assistance in developing teaching competencies, and preparing for assessment.
5) Include in follow-up training guidance and practice for completing logs, raising the probability that entries will be specific, descriptive and accurate representations of mentor activities.
6) Stress more heavily during follow-up training the value of data collection and its relationship to effective feedback giving.
7) Provide assistance to mentors in developing effective coaching skills, through on-site individual visits.
8) Provide incentives for those mentors who meet responsibilities as outlined by the State Dept. of Education, and remove from the pool of mentor candidates those who do not met responsibilities.
9) Invite mentors to critique and assess their own work with beginners as to their own effectiveness in the four listed areas of accountability, and to request stipends based on self-assessment.
10) Use mentor log analysis to determine whether or not mentors have met previously communicated responsibilities, and issue stipends based on the results of individual log analysis.
11) Involve district facilitators in the process of providing support for mentors in the coaching of beginning teachers as well as in accountability checks on mentor activities.

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